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A Shiite cleric's criticism of Shiism: Mūsā al-Mūsāwī

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A SHIITE CLERIC'S CRITICISM OF SHIISM:  
MŪSĀ AL-MŪSAWĪ

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The intellectual history of Twelver Shiism in the 20th century has witnessed quite a few attempts by religious scholars and lay intellectuals at religious reform, which nearly inevitably meant criticism of existing practices. The reformers have concentrated on various aspects of Shiite popular religion with a high symbolic value which determine the outward appearance of Shiism and its relation to mainstream Sunni Islam. Not least because of that strong symbolism they have deemed these practices to be against the true spirit of Shiism, even against the spirit of Islam itself. Muḥsin al-Amīn, for example, found himself in the centre of a famous controversy about the flagellation rituals on 'āshūrā' day after having written a booklet in which he condemned the bloody self-mutilation as a *bid'ā* that had to be abolished.<sup>1</sup> Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Mahdī al-Khālīsī equally attracted criticism of his Shiite fellow 'ulamā', when he demanded that Friday prayer should be more carefully observed within the realm of Shiism and that the notorious third *shahāda* should be avoided.<sup>2</sup> Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, finally, fought repeatedly against what he considered to be a sign of backwardness and exaggerated veneration of 'Alī and the Imāms.<sup>3</sup> All these endeavors nevertheless focussed on narrowly defined single aspects of Shiism without questioning the theological, doctrinal or historical identity and distinctness of Shiism itself.

In comparison with these partial reforms, the book *al-Shī'a wa-l-taṣḥīḥ* that will be discussed in this paper must be called radical in every respect. Its author Mūsā al-Mūsawī does not confine himself to the usual aspects of popular religion, but addresses the very fun-

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<sup>1</sup> Ende, "The Flagellations of Muḥarram", passim; Julian Siddons has just finished his Ph.D. dissertation on Mūsā al-Mūsawī; I am most grateful to him for having made his typescript available to me in advance.

<sup>2</sup> Ende, "Erfolg und Scheitern", passim.

<sup>3</sup> Mughniyya, *al-Shī'a wa-l-taṣḥīḥ*, pp. 13ff.

damentals of Shiism—the imamate, the belief in the mahdī, etc.—, and launches scathing attacks on the religious leadership, i.e. the ‘ulamā’ and fuqahā’ in all chapters. But before going into the details of his argumentation, some words about the life of the author seem appropriate. It should be borne in mind, however, that there does not exist an independent biography of al-Mūsawī. Instead, one has to rely on the informations that he himself provides on the covers of his books and that are therefore at best one-sided, revealing only those parts of his life that he wishes to be displayed in public.<sup>4</sup> Information furnished by his opponents cannot be taken at face value either, because these authors, whose personal hatred of al-Mūsawī can hardly be overlooked, try to portray him as a villain who made a fortune by counterfeiting money and who collaborated with the Shāh’s secret service SAVAK.<sup>5</sup>

Mūsā al-Mūsawī was born in Najaf in 1930. His grandfather was the famous Āyatollāh Abū l-Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1946) who, towards the end of his life, was acknowledged by most Shiites as the sole *marja’ al-taqlīd*.<sup>6</sup> The elevated status and prominence of his grandfather is a very important source of legitimation for our author. Starting in the very first paragraph of his book, he refers to him repeatedly as one of the few exceptions among an otherwise tyrannical and selfish religious leadership.<sup>7</sup> Mūsā’s father, Ḥasan al-Iṣfahānī, died in the year of his son’s birth, being the victim of an assassination attempt by a lunatic whom al-Mūsawī suspects to have been an agent of the colonialist powers.<sup>8</sup>

Mūsā al-Mūsawī studied in Najaf and claims to have received an *ijtihād* diploma out of the hands of the famous scholar Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn Āl Kāshif al-Ghiṭā’ in 1951/52—at the unusual young age of 21 or 22. After pursuing his studies at Tehran University and receiving a doctorate in jurisprudence in 1955, he proceeded to the

<sup>4</sup> See the back covers of his books *al-Shī’a wa-l-taṣṣih*, *al-Thawra al-bā’isa* and *al-Muḍḥahidān*; the data given there differ in some details from each other.

<sup>5</sup> See the introduction by Salīm al-Ḥasanī in Qazwīnī, *Ma’a al-duktūr Mūsā al-Mūsawī*, pp. 13–23.

<sup>6</sup> *Er* 1/302f. (H. Algar); Momen, *Introduction*, pp. 261f., 315; Luizard, *Formation*, index, s.v.; Sharīf Rāzī, *Garjine-ye dāneshmandān*, vol. 1, pp. 216ff.; al-Ṭihirānī, *Ṭabaqāt a’lām al-shī’a*, vol. I. 1, pp. 41f.; al-Amīn, *A’yān al-shī’a*, vol. 2, pp. 331ff.; Ja’far al-Khalīlī, *Hākadhā ‘arāfuhum*, vol. 1, Baghdad 1963, pp. 97–120.

<sup>7</sup> *al-Shī’a wa-l-taṣṣih*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*; al-Khalīlī, *Hākadhā ‘arāfuhum*, p. 111, by contrast only speaks of “one of the students, whose madness was proven afterwards”.

Sorbonne where he was awarded a second Ph.D. in Islamic philosophy in 1959.<sup>9</sup> In the course of the following two decades he taught economics and philosophy at various universities, mainly in Tehran and Baghdad; during the 1970s he turned up as a visiting lecturer in Halle (in the former GDR), Tripoli (Libya), Harvard and Los Angeles. In 1968 he survived an assassination attempt for which he held the SAVAK responsible; in 1980 he stood—again by his own account—as a candidate for the post of President of the Islamic Republic, before finally settling down in Los Angeles at some time in the 1980s as President of a so-called High Islamic Council of America. He allegedly participated in the peace negotiations in 1988 between Iraq and Iran (apparently on the Iraqi side), and seems to have been in contact with the former Shaykh al-Azhar, Jād al-Ḥaqq, whom he met in Cairo in the same year.<sup>10</sup> The only piece of information that is available to me beyond this official curriculum vitae is the more interesting because it depicts al-Mūsawī as being Khomeinī's special commissioner in Iranian Kurdistan from August 1982 onwards, appointed in order "to investigate the religious and social problems" there.<sup>11</sup> The picture that emerges from these fragments is at the very least that of an extremely ambivalent character. This ambivalence, however, may help us in turn to understand and assess his sharp criticism of Shiism that came to the fore at the end of the 1980s. Mūsā al-Mūsawī reportedly died some three or four years ago.<sup>12</sup>

Al-Mūsawī's books include several works on Islamic philosophy,<sup>13</sup> on contemporary politics within Iran in the 1970s and '80s<sup>14</sup> as well as on Shiite doctrines. The by far most important contribution he made to this latter field is the booklet *al-Shi'a wa-l-taṣṭiḥ* that first appeared in Los Angeles in 1987, but was quickly reprinted in the Arab world, e.g. in Cairo 1989. Meanwhile, a French translation has also been published.<sup>15</sup> The book's 160 pages amount to nothing

<sup>9</sup> Moussa Esphehani, *Molla Sadra et son apport philosophique*, Thèse Univ. de Paris 1959.

<sup>10</sup> See the photo in *al-Mudṭahhidān*, p. 383.

<sup>11</sup> Ch. MacDonald, "The Impact of the Gulf War on the Kurds", *Middle East Contemporary Survey* 7 (1982–83), p. 269; Buchta, *Die iranische Schia*, p. 193.

<sup>12</sup> Oral communication by Yousif al-Khoei.

<sup>13</sup> *Min al-Suhrawardī ilā l-Kindī*, Beirut 1979; *Min al-Kindī ilā Ibn Rushd*, Beirut, Paris 1977; *al-Jadid fi falsafat Sadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī*, Baghdad 1978.

<sup>14</sup> *Īrān fi rub' qarn*, Baghdad 1972; *al-Thawra al-bā'isa*, s.l., ca. 1985.

<sup>15</sup> *Les chiïtes et la réforme. Du chiïsme premier aux pratiques d'aujourd'hui. Traduction de T. Gaid*, Paris 1997. Two other titles pointing in the same direction were not avail-

less than a fundamental refutation of all parts of Shiism—at least in its existing form, because by the title-word *taṣḥīḥ* (“correction, critical revision”) al-Mūsawī claims to speak as a reformist whose aim it is to purge Shiism of all aberrations and deviations that were inflicted upon it in the course of time. This impression is increased by the subtitle *al-Ṣirāʾ bayn al-shīʿa wa-l-tashayyūʿ*, “the struggle between Shia and Shiism”. It has to be borne in mind, however, that the author does not give a clear definition of the two terms. Moreover, he not always uses them consistently and in opposition to each other, indeed he sometimes even treats them as synonyms. Only at one point does he state that the Shia is a distortion of *tashayyūʿ*; I will be returning to this idea shortly.

It is made clear by this that al-Mūsawī thus starts from the assumption that there are two kinds of Shiism, a pure and true early one, and a distorted later version that continues to exist up to the present day. At first glance, one may feel reminded of ‘Alī Shariʿatī’s famous distinction between what he once called ‘Alid Shiism and Ṣafawid Shiism: *Tashayyūʿ-e ʿalawī wa tashayyūʿ-e ṣafawī*.<sup>16</sup> For him, ‘Alid Shiism was the pure form, Ṣafawid Shiism the distortion. But there are important and substantive differences between the two authors. Shariʿatī is concerned with the content of the doctrinal precepts and their “correct” interpretation. Driven by revolutionary zeal, he criticized the lax attitude of the ‘*ulamāʾ*’ towards the basic Shiite concepts of *ʿisma*, *wiṣāya*, or of the imamate itself. In his eyes, these and other ideas had to be restored in their original meaning in order to strengthen a revolutionary Islamic ideology. This is almost the exact contrary of al-Mūsawī’s approach who regards the very concepts and basic notions of historical—and particularly contemporary—Shiism as being contrary to the will and orders of Muḥammad, ‘Alī and the Imams. Shariʿatī and al-Mūsawī also differ about the era in which true Shiism became distorted. For Shariʿatī it was only after the rise of the Ṣafawids who transformed the revolutionary “red” Shiism (as he also called ‘Alid Shiism) into the conservative and authoritarian “black” Shiism with its climax in the Pahlavī period.

able to me: *al-Ṣarkha al-kubrā. ʿAqīdat al-shīʿa fī uṣūl al-dīn wa-furūʿihī fī ʿaṣr al-aʿimma wa-baʿdahum*, Los Angeles 1991; *Yā shīʿat al-ʿālam istayyiqū*, s.l., ca. 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Shariʿatī, *Tashayyūʿ-e ʿalawī*, esp. pp. 258ff.; cf. Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, pp. 231ff.; A. Bausani, “Sciismo ‘alide’ e sciismo ‘safavide’ in un libro di ‘Alī Shariʿatī (m. 1977)”, *Oriente Moderno* 62 (1982), pp. 83–88; Savory, “Orthodoxy and aberrancy”, pp. 172ff.

Al-Mūsawī goes further back; he is convinced that the watershed was the final disappearance of the twelfth Imam and the beginning of the great occultation in the middle of the tenth century. All later developments led Shiism away from its origins and away also from the other Islamic confessions so that now Shiites are isolated within Islam. The Ṣafawid era and contemporary Shiism have helped to reinforce this isolation. Al-Mūsawī's declared aim therefore is to bridge the gap between Sunnism and Shiism and to rouse the Shiites from their 1,200 year old slumber.<sup>17</sup>

The first chapter of his book (with more than 40 pages it is by far the longest one)<sup>18</sup> is devoted to the problematic relationship between the Shiite imamate and the Sunnite caliphate. From the beginning al-Mūsawī emphasizes that the main problem between the two denominations is not the issue of the caliphate as such, but rather the Shiite custom of cursing the Sunnite caliphs, especially the *rāshidūn*. This is also the only time that he explicitly describes the difference, even the "huge abyss" (*huwwa 'azīma*) between the Shia and Shiism (*tashayyu'*):<sup>19</sup> The Shia, he states, distorted the meaning of *tashayyu'* from love and veneration of 'Alī and the *ahl al-bayt* to hatred and abuse of the *khulafā' al-rāshidīn*. Shiism, one may surmise, is upright piety and righteousness, Shia is equivalent to fanaticism and diatribe. The transition from Shiism to Shia was the main reason for all further deviations that have taken place since the great *ghayba*.

This attitude, al-Mūsawī asserts, is particularly reprehensible as it is a one-sided hatred, because the Sunnites in turn do not depreciate the *ahl al-bayt*, but hold them in great reverence. Although he counts recourse to the imams in juristic matters and the conviction that the imams were more rightfully entitled to the caliphate than the Umayyads and Abbasids among the basic characteristics of early *tashayyu'*, he nevertheless vigorously denies the existence of any divine order designating 'Alī and his offspring as the legitimate successors of the prophet. Rather the traditions in which the so-called *naṣṣ ilāhī* in favour of 'Alī was maintained, were invented only after the occultation of the twelfth imam. By this step the issue of the imamate was added to the fundamentals of the religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*), and as

<sup>17</sup> *al-Shī'a wa-l-taṣḥīḥ*, pp. 5–7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8–50.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8f.

a kind of safeguard the doctrines of the sinlessness of the imams (*ʿisma*) and the *taqiyya* were invented at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

True, he continues, Muḥammad felt great affection for his son-in-law and would have preferred him as leader of the community to any other person, and ʿAlī too regarded himself as being the most qualified candidate. But in Muḥammad's case, it was only the prophet's personal wish that was in no way backed by a divine decree. And Muḥammad would never have imposed his personal wishes on his community without God's order to do so. As far as ʿAlī's self-assessment is concerned, this did not lead him to any opposition or even revolt against Abū Bakr, ʿUmar or ʿUthmān. All subsequent imams shared this sense of loyalty—and moreover, any divine order would have become too widely known so that it would never have been possible to conceal it.<sup>21</sup>

In al-Mūsawī's view, the only way to overcome this fundamental problem consists in a complete change of the Shiite attitude towards the caliphate. The Shiites should return to the Koran, take Muḥammad and the imams again as a model and refrain from disowning the caliphs. All Shiite books containing invented traditions should be sieved and purged from such passages. But above all, the Shiites should no longer obey their religious leadership whose sole intention in fabricating and upholding these *bidaʿ* was to seize power over the believers. Until the present day, al-Mūsawī concludes this chapter, the religious leaders have been "playing football with Shiism" and are making it a laughing stock of the whole world.<sup>22</sup>

Having dealt with this basic conflict, al-Mūsawī now turns to the main doctrines on which Shiism rests. He strings together the issues one by one, apparently without too great an effort at systematization and taking into consideration even some sophisticated aspects of high theology that normally tend to be neglected in this kind of literature.<sup>23</sup> But these are only minor aspects; other issues are more

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 14f.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 17–46.

<sup>22</sup> Here e.g. he uses the term *shīʿa*, and not *tashayyūʿ* as one would expect after his introductory definition: Ibid., pp. 46–50: "fa-inna al-zaʿāmāt al-madhhabiyya al-shīʿiyya laʿibat bi-l-shīʿa ka-l-kura fa-ramathā bi-aqdāmihā hunā wa-hunāk" (p. 50).

<sup>23</sup> This especially holds true for the Shiite belief in the return to life of some of the dead before the actual resurrection (*raʿā*), the conviction that God may change his will (*badāʿ*) and the permission for Shiites to combine the noon and afternoon and the evening and night prayers, thus reducing the number of daily prayers to three (*al-jamʿ bayn al-ṣalātayn*): Ibid., pp. 126–51; on the concept of *raʿā* cf. the article



important—and more explosive. It is characteristic for his approach that he deals with the central question of the sinlessness of the imams in the chapter that is dedicated to religious extremism and exaggeration (*ghuluww*) in general.<sup>24</sup> According to al-Mūsawī, this doctrine forms what he calls “theoretical” exaggeration (*al-ghuluww al-naẓarī*) and is on a par with “practical” *ghuluww* that consists in the worship of the tombs of the imams. Exempting the imams from sin means in reality belittling them, because it deprives them of their free will, he maintains. Yet at the same time, the alleged infallibility as well as the belief in their esoteric knowledge exceed even the attributes of the Prophet and therefore run counter to the fact that there cannot be any miracle after Muḥammad.

Since this certainty is testified by the Koran—Verse 5/3 reads “Today I have perfected your religion for you”—, the doctrine of *ʿisma* is ultimately contrary to the Holy Book. Needless to say, the imams rejected these false beliefs and the doctrines in question were only due to *ḥadīths* that were fabricated during the occultation.

Once more, it is the Shiite jurists, the *fuqahāʾ*, who are guilty in their books of having embedded the exaggerations in the minds of the believers. Al-Mūsawī explicitly includes the so-called “four books” (*al-kutub al-arbaʿa*) written by the founding-fathers of Twelver Shiite theology after the occultation of the twelfth imam, but also highly esteemed works of later generations, e.g. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī’s *Bihār al-anwār*.<sup>25</sup> This is, of course, tantamount to declaring the very cornerstone of Shiite piety, the belief in the super-human nature of the imams, a gigantic superstition—and it is no doubt deliberate. This attack is all the more a slap in the *ʿulamāʾ*’s face as they too, in the course of the 20th century, did not grow tired of dissociating themselves from anything that smacked of *ghuluww*, especially when discussing the prospects of a rapprochement between Sunnism and Shiism.<sup>26</sup> Again, al-Mūsawī demands the critical revision of Twelver Shiite literature and the discarding of all traditions on which *ghuluww* is based.

“Radjʿa” in *EI*<sup>2</sup> vol. 8, pp. 371ff. (E. Kohlberg), on *badāʾ* see *EIr* vol. 3, pp. 354f. (W. Madelung), on *jamʿ* see Momen, *Introduction*, p. 178.

<sup>24</sup> *al-Shiʿa wa-l-taṣṭih*, pp. 80–84.

<sup>25</sup> On the “four books” cf. Momen, *Introduction*, p. 174; on al-Majlisī see *EI*<sup>2</sup> vol. 5, pp. 1086ff. (A. H. Hairi) and *EIr* vol. 4, pp. 90ff. (E. Kohlberg).

<sup>26</sup> Brunner, *Annäherung und Distanz*, pp. 180f.



Invented traditions, unscrupulous scholars, the need for a revision of the books—these are the indispensable ingredients of the other chapters as well. Particularly his attacks on the religious leadership are the leitmotif of the book. Al-Mūsawī characteristically combines the term *fuqahā'* with the “eulogy” *sāmaḥahumu llāh* (“may God forgive them”) in most cases. In his view, they invented *taqīya* as a political instrument against the Abbasids,<sup>27</sup> supported reprehensible innovations like the flagellations on ‘*āshūrā*’ day or the third *shahāda*,<sup>28</sup> defended the institution of temporary marriage, thereby reducing women to the level of sheer commodities,<sup>29</sup> or else they failed to oppose with sufficient vigour the view that the Koran was distorted.<sup>30</sup> Most important, however, is the fact that they usurped the place of the hidden imam by levying the *khums* on the profits of ordinary business transactions—which made them rich—and by establishing the doctrine of the *wilāyat al-faqīh*—which made them powerful.<sup>31</sup> Al-Mūsawī does not call Khomeinī by name in this passage, but it is obvious that the latter is his main target. The ultimate consequence of the blind obedience of the believers is religious terrorism that has a long tradition within Shiite Islam and today enjoys the support of the Iranian regime. Again, he avoids a direct accusation of Khomeinī and his followers—he even states that he does not seek confrontation with the Islamic Republic—but between the lines, his intention is fairly clear.<sup>32</sup>

Given the scope of al-Mūsawī's criticism and the tone he is adopting throughout his book—at one point he chooses the formulation “we know it and the Shia themselves know it”, as if he were no longer a Shiite<sup>33</sup>—, the reaction of other writers in the Islamic world

<sup>27</sup> *al-Shī'a wa-l-taḥṣīḥ*, pp. 51–59.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97–106; by supporting the flagellations the ‘*ulamā'*—al-Mūsawī maintains—played into the colonialists' hands who e.g. in India fostered these practices in order to convey an image of the Muslims as savages who were in need of being “rescued” by the British.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107–13.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131–36; on the topic of *tahrīf* cf. *ET*<sup>2</sup> vol. 10, pp. 111f.; Kohlberg, “Some Notes”; Brunner, *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung*.

<sup>31</sup> *al-Shī'a wa-l-taḥṣīḥ*, pp. 65–76; on *khums* cf. Sachedina, *Just ruler*, pp. 237–45; on the “classical” doctrine of *wilāyat al-faqīh* cf. *ibid.*, pp. 173ff.; on Khomeinī's interpretation cf. Enayat, “Khumayni's concept”, *passim*; see also Ḥaidar, *al-Imāma*, pp. 99f.

<sup>32</sup> *al-Shī'a wa-l-taḥṣīḥ*, pp. 119–25.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

(Sunnite and Shiite) is not really astonishing. The task is comparatively easy for Sunnite critics of Shiism, because al-Mūsawī gives them ample opportunity to see their own judgements being corroborated by a Shiite cleric who, moreover, is the grandson of one of the outstanding Āyatollāhs of the 20th century. Furthermore, al-Mūsawī referred to the Salafiyya movement several times in a positive way,<sup>34</sup> and had no qualms about turning to the journal of the Wahhābī-inspired Muslim World League to voice his criticism of Khomeinī and Shiism.<sup>35</sup> All they have to do, therefore, is to cite al-Mūsawī more or less in detail, without providing too much commentary of their own.<sup>36</sup> Opposition to the book, on the other hand, came from Shiite authors who wrote detailed refutations in which they questioned al-Mūsawī's claim to be a *mujtahid*. For them, al-Mūsawī is on a par with the most notorious Sunnite polemicists against Shiism in the 20th century such as Mūsā Jārallāh, Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb or Iḥsān Ilāhī Zahrī.<sup>37</sup> In this kind of reflex movement, they defend even those issues that over the past few decades were by no means undisputed among Shiite scholars, e.g. the *taqiyya* or the concept of *wilāyat al-faqīh*.<sup>38</sup>

We can only speculate as to what al-Mūsawī's reasons for writing this book may have been. A glance at two of his earlier works may offer us some hints. In the 1970s he appeared to be in bitter oppo-

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 64, 80, 91; cf. Art. "Salafiyya", *EI*<sup>2</sup> vol. 8, pp. 900–09 (P. Shinar, W. Ende).

<sup>35</sup> *al-Rābi'a*, issue 275, 26th year (Jan.–Febr. 1988), pp. 6–9.

<sup>36</sup> Bahnasāwī, *al-Haqā'iq*, pp. 86–89; Nimr, *al-Mu'āmarā*, pp. 38–48; Mālallāh, *Naqd*, pp. 32–38; Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, *al-'Aqā'id al-shi'iyya*, pp. 140–49 (referring to al-Mūsawī's *al-Thawra al-bā'isa*); Quṭb, *Min Ṭahrān*, passim.

<sup>37</sup> Hāshimī, *al-Shi'a wa-l-tahqīq*, pp. 9ff., Qazwīnī, *Ma'a l-duktūr Mūsā al-Mūsawī*, pp. 29, 323 and passim; see also al-Tījānī, *al-Shi'a hum ahl al-sunna*, pp. 309ff.; on Jārallāh, al-Khaṭīb and Zahrī see Brunner, *Annäherung und Distanz*, pp. 41, 193ff. and 290, respectively.

<sup>38</sup> Hāshimī, pp. 79–84, 91f.; Qazwīnī, pp. 171–82, 208–23; it should be added here, however, that al-Mūsawī is not the only Shiite author who rejected the very fundamentals of the Shiite doctrine in recent years: In 1997/98 the presumably Lebanese writer Aḥmad al-Kātib published a book on the development of Shiite political thought (al-Kātib: *Taḥawwūṣ*) in which he came to the conclusion that the existence of the twelfth imām was a mere fancy and that the 'ulamā's claim to act as representatives of the Mahdī was therefore completely illegitimate; cf. the contribution by Roswitha Badry to this volume. Moreover, there are some Shiite authors who severely criticized Khomeinī's concept of *wilāyat al-faqīh* without questioning the principal values of Shiism; cf. e.g. Göbel, *Moderne schiitische Politik*, pp. 128ff. (on Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya's criticism).

sition to the Shāh; in this context, he wrote a book on “Iran in the Quarter of a Century” which contains a chapter on the religious leadership in Iran and Iraq. There, he found remarkably laudatory words for Khomeinī and his fight against the Shāh and regarded him as one of the very few clerics of this kind, the two others being Abū l-Qāsim al-Khūʾī and Ḥasan al-Qummī. He even called Khomeinī “the greatest religious person that took refuge in Iraq and chose Najaf as his residence.”<sup>39</sup> Some 13 years and one revolution later, nothing was left of this friendly attitude. In his book “The Miserable Revolution”, al-Mūsawī accused Khomeinī of having introduced the doctrine of *wilāyat al-faqīh* to provide the theoretical basis for absolute despotism, comparable only to Hitler’s “Mein Kampf”. He deemed the Islamic Republic to be the fifth column of colonialism, a distortion of Islam and a mixture of anarchy, communism, fascism and National Socialism. Khomeinī was now described bluntly as a megalomaniac who did not even shrink from having his name included in the daily call for prayer.<sup>40</sup> From this—and from the fact that at least at the beginning of the revolution he seems to have been on friendly terms with the new regime—we may conclude that his uncompromising criticism of Shiism originated in his growing disappointment at the first Shiite takeover of power in modern times. This phenomenon is of course not new, not even within Islam: many a Sunnite who initially supported the Iranian revolution justified his later opposition by claiming to be disillusioned; and even before 1979 this pattern of behaviour can be observed on many occasions.<sup>41</sup> Compared to Sunni polemicists, al-Mūsawī who was himself a Shiite cleric had to cover a much longer distance. In the very end, his call for a de facto conversion of the Shiites to Sunnism forms a fascinating mixture of theological polemical treatise, political pamphlet and renegade literature. Al-Mūsawī’s view of Shiism certainly lacks impartiality. But renegades rarely set out to be impartial.

<sup>39</sup> *Īrān fī rubʿ qarn*, pp. 82ff., 146f.; ironically, he criticized al-Khūʾī in his *al-Shīʿa wa-l-taṣṭīḥ* (pp. 132f.) for adhering to the conviction that ʿAlī possessed a Koran of his own in which the commentary revealed by God was included; on al-Khūʾī’s attitude towards the question of *tahrīf al-quʾān* cf. his *Bayān fī tafsīr al-quʾān*, pp. 136ff. and Brunner: *Die Schia und die Koranfälschung*, pp. 88ff.

<sup>40</sup> *al-Thawra al-bāʿisa*, pp. 49–62, 126–33, 162–64, 183–92.

<sup>41</sup> Buchta, *Die iranische Schia*, pp. 227ff.; see also Brunner, *Annäherung und Distanz*, pp. 185f.